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ABSTRACT

One of a series of monographs providing information about the Delaware Model: A Systems Approach to Science Education (Del Mod System), this monograph describes the role of field agents. These agents are responsible for individual teachers who express a desire for involvement in improving teacher effectiveness and to be involved in the teaching of science. The ground rules for such a position are spelled out to include some of the things to avoid doing, such as anything that would infringe on the autonomy of the district, the confidence of the teacher, and the credibility of the field agent himself. Suggestions such as cooperation with administration, meeting with teachers, implementation of activities, suggestions for specific sessions with teachers, and various methods of proposing changes are described. References are cited. (EB)

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FIELD AGENT ACTIVITIES: LEVEL 1

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FIELD AGENT ACTIVITIES: LEVEL 1

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Field Agent Activities: Level I

CLASSIFICATION

It was tentatively agreed during the first year of expanded science field agent operations in Delaware that the field agent generalists were responsible for individual teachers who were expressing desires for involvement in at least two areas: a) to be involved in improving "teacher effectiveness" and b) to be involved in "teaching of science." The teachers could further be categorized by level of instruction, elementary as opposed to middle school or junior high. The classification of Level I subsequently became associated with those teachers in the elementary school who wished to "teach science" and Level I-A with those teachers in the elementary school interested in "improving effectiveness."[2] (Level II has become associated with the science teachers at the junior high school level.)

Before one can begin activities aimed at improving effectiveness one must have teachers interested in changing efficiency levels in the particular area with which one is concerned. Arousing and maintaining interest in doing science is a substantial portion of a Level I field agent's charge. In short, a Level I field agent generalist must "sell sciencing."[3]

The question at this point becomes one of "How does a field agent do the prementioned selling job?" At the same time that this is being answered it must be remembered that one of the parameters that one must stay within is the "permanent system."[4] The ground rules that are inferred by the "system" are further defined by other boundaries such as local school district autonomy.

WATCH OUTS

This then sets up the following "watch outs" for future field agents such as the demonstration lesson. As soon as you do a lesson with another instructor's class you lose your "I-am-here-to-assist" classification and are immediately transferred to "supervisor or evaluator status." This infringes on the autonomy of the district, the confidence of the classroom teacher and the credibility of the field agent. A field agent position does not exist to supply teachers with free time. While what a field agent does with a class may, or may not, be very good, it must be kept in

mind that teaching is quite personality dependent and that people are not lumps that can be molded into just any pattern. Another "watch out" is the "panacea aura" which accompanies a field agent. A field agent will not have all the solutions to a teacher's educational problems. This kind of invincibility must be dispelled as soon as possible. It will enhance the field agent's relationship with the teachers and increase overall effectiveness.

Another "watch out" is for line and staff feuding. While concentrating dislike may sometimes be an effective technique for other purposes, if it is directed against the field agent it will destroy effective Del Mod assistance in the school district.

A third "watch out" is the "my-warehouse-has-arrived syndrome." Neither Del Mod nor its staff is responsible for supplying teachers throughout the state with equipment or materials. This is strictly a local district responsibility. Field agents or science resource centers can and should supply materials on a short-time basis to increase the purchasing discrimination of school personnel but not to decrease monetary independence. This last "watch out" is particularly pertinent for Level I field agents since many classroom instructors feel that the program and doing science are entirely dependent on shiney materials. This is not true.

ADMINISTRATIVE PERMISSION

One might consider an approach to the initial question of selling science then, as following the post-mentioned steps and sequence.

It is absolutely essential that the services of Del Mod complement the district philosophy and idiosyncrasies. The majority of administrators are usually quite concerned about their staff and the impression that the staff leaves with the children. Consequently, they are more willing to see that opportunities of staff improvement and exposure are available. However, the staff is "their staff" and the communications line with them should be kept wide open and understandable.

MEETING WITH TEACHERS

After receiving permission to visit and work with volunteer teachers, the next step is to meet them. It is advantageous if the first meeting is little

more than a short how-do-you-do-nice-to-meet-you type. This immediately infers that you will not waste the teachers' time with semantic pedantics. It also gives the involved teachers a chance to see that you are not as awe-inspiring as the title might sound. At a later meeting with a group of interested teachers from the same school or district, a tentative schedule of group meeting times and possible activities is designed. This is largely based on a statement of needs collected from each and every teacher. It is essential that this be done for if one wishes to "sell", one must gain the confidence of the "buyer." It is easiest to do this if the classroom teacher can have input as to what and how they will be working with you and with their children. After all, the teacher knows his or her class much better than the field agent does. If is only logical then to utilize this expertise initially and immediately get the teachers "doing."

IMPLEMENTATION

The last major step is implementing the designed activities and steps. This can involve, and usually does, everything from small group workshops with one district only to large group days involving several school districts. In many cases this is the only time specifically provided for a sharing of ideas and problems. A very important facet of the selling of implementation is the one-to-one classroom assistance and continued personal contact. Teachers may have had some of the Del Mod services previously but it has usually been on a short-term basis and from an administrative or supervisory level. The field agent is not a supervisory person nor is he or she going to drop everything and run. Field agents must be prepared to do the little extra things, spend the little extra time, be prepared, and in some cases be exceedingly thick skinned.

SPECIFIC SESSION

A typical session with a Level I field agent and teachers might follow this pattern. Keep in mind the needs that would be listed for this pattern would probably be: "I teach all subjects," "I don't have the stuff you use," "My children can't read," and "The metric system, oh, my." First, let the teachers work in small groups or teams. Ask each group or team to determine the length of something in the room. You as a field agent have supplied nothing. The teams will eventually begin measuring and answering your questions in pocketbooks, pieces of

paper, spans, etc. The point is quickly made with teachers that there should be standard units of length. Immediately hand out standard but unmarked lengths. Ask for measurements of other objects. Two points are made: that standard lengths are only of lasting value if all groups have the same standard of length and names of units, and that some units are more convenient than others. Ask teachers to measure their shadows. This leads to an interesting discussion of why some are larger than others which after dwelling on the obvious answer a teacher or the field agent brings out the consideration of the position of the light source. This leads to "time." Linear measure, of course, lends itself well to developing a model for time. Linear measure and shadows lead naturally to such things as sun dials and since sun dials are inexpensive to construct and use, an additional hands-on activity is presented. Teachers can start to construct one with materials and designs provided by the field agent.[5]

SUCCESS EXPERIENCE

It is imperative that a sequence of activities and questions be set up so that everyone has some immediate gratification, some "instant success." After all, in most cases the backgrounds, competency levels, and atitudes of the participants in regard to sciencing are often not of an overwhelmingly enthusiastic nature.

ADAPTION AS OPPOSED TO ADOPTION

The described activities involve segments of several already published programs - I.M.E., S.A.P.A., and E.S.S. Hopefully, in such a session there are many things going on which will be transferred to some extent by osmosis. A field agent must be prepared and organized. Obviously, an active learning approach is dependent on good management. By having several empirical activities, teachers and their children would become involved for long periods of time. A myriad of additional extensions can be displayed and chatted about individually. Linear measure lends itself nicely to the actual construction of typical houses or forts used in colonial times. This sometimes serves to interest the self-contained instructor who much prefers history to science. Thus, we are deviously changing science from a noun to a verb by extending the activities in such a way.

CONCLUSION

Throughout all Level I field agent work the individual success experience for each teacher is stressed. An attempt is made to tie this in logically with other levels of instruction and with perceived needs. It is a procedure which is dependent on getting teachers involved and field agent-instructor rapport with the teachers. It emphasizes learning together as opposed to teaching in the classic teacher-pupil relationship. As of this writing it works.

REFERENCES

1. This term refers to those field agents who rather than being assigned to a specific school district or a specific project are covering all districts and all projects in a geographical area.

2. Logan, B.A., and Gussett, J.H., Field Agent Activities in the Del Mod System, Dover, Delaware 1972

3. Dr. Seymour B. Sarason lists several characteristics of a school culture in his book, The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971. One of these is "One of the most frequent complaints of supervisors or principals is that too many teachers are not creative or innovative but adhere slavishly to the curriculum despite pleas emphasizing freedom." This is true but for many different reasons depending on to whom one talks. Suffice it to say that elementary teachers generally do not feel comfortable with science, are not enthusiastic about science, and get this across to children very quickly by utilizing a fact-or-textbook-centered approach when anything is done at all.

4. Purnell, C.H. The Delaware Model: A Systems Approach, Dover, Delaware 1972

5. This specific session is not a hypothetical situation. It is generalized in writing perhaps to make it more applicable. Names, etc., are not provided for that would be paradoxical to the non-evaluator role.